

CEPPS/IRI Quarterly Report: January - March 2005
Azerbaijan: Political Party Strengthening
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. 112-A-00-02-00012-00
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I. SUMMARY

The International Republican Institute's programs are designed to help Azerbaijanis strengthen democracy through increasing their participation in the political process. IRI's programs primarily concentrate on two areas: political party strengthening and increasing the role of youth and women in the democratic process.

Political party strengthening is an area in which IRI has worked extensively in Azerbaijan and around the world. Parties are relied upon to represent the needs of the citizens; however, few political parties in Azerbaijan understand or reflect the needs of the people. IRI's program in Azerbaijan will assist the political parties in becoming more democratic internally and being more responsive to the demands of the public.

Increasing the role of youth in the political process is also a key component of IRI's program. Young men and women need to learn the tools to forge a successful democracy in the 21st century, and currently their needs are not being met. IRI will work to bridge the gap between young people and the political process so that the foundation can be laid for the future leadership of Azerbaijan.

Azeri women are generally disempowered and remain outside the political process. This is due to the discriminatory socio-economic status and social norms that discourage women's participation in public life. Political parties have women's branches, but they are small and weak. Parties particularly struggle to attract women into politics in the regions outside Baku. IRI will work with the women of Azerbaijan through civic education and public awareness as well as working with female candidates in the lead up to the parliamentary elections.

In April 2004, IRI started a new two-and-a-half-year USAID extension to continue the development of political parties, as well as its work with youth and women activists.

II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

IRI's programs primarily concentrate on two areas:

- 1) political party strengthening;
- 2) increasing the role of youth and women in the democratic process.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

This quarter IRI conducted a political environment assessment, continued to support four constituency offices, conducted a quarterly regional youth conference in Ganja, conducted

consensus building trainings for political parties, and launched a local IRI website.

Azerbaijan Political Environment Assessment

From February 17-26, 2005, IRI conducted a political environment assessment that consisted of two objectives: 1) to learn what was necessary for Azerbaijan to achieve the goal of a free and fair parliamentary election, 2) develop a list of specific activities that could be undertaken by IRI and the international community to assist Azerbaijan in achieving that goal.

To assist IRI in this assessment, IRI contracted Tony Marsh, a political consultant, from Marsh Copsey & Associates. Tony has worked with political campaigns in the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Iraq. Mr. Marsh was accompanied by Andy Colburn, Dallas Frohrib, and Jeff Greene. During the 10-day assessment, the team conducted over 40 interviews among a large variety of political activists in Baku, Lenkoran, Sabirabad, and Ganja. Interviews were conducted with the political party leaders of Musavat, Azerbaijan National Independence Party, Popular Front Party, Civil Solidarity, Adalat, Azerbaijan Democratic Party, and Yeni Azerbaijan Party, prospective candidates, journalists, U.S. Embassy personnel, regional Azerbaijani officials, and representatives from both government and non-governmental organizations, both domestic and international.

The result of the assessment was a comprehensive report that detailed 30 activities that the international community can undertake to assist Azerbaijan in conducting free and fair elections. The report has been disseminated to the democracy and governance community and action plans are being designed.

Regional Youth Conference

On March 10-12, 2005, IRI conducted a youth conference entitled “Civic Activism: Moving from Ideas to Action” in Ganja, Azerbaijan. More than 65 youth representing members of the youth branches from five Azerbaijani political parties (Popular Front, Musavat, Yeni Azerbaijan Party, Azerbaijan Democratic Party, Azerbaijan New Independent Party), alumni of international student exchange programs, Azerbaijani youth NGOs and students from six Western Azerbaijani regions (Ganja, Mingechevir, Barda, Tovuz, Gazakh, Yevlakh) attended the three-day event. The breakdown of the participants by parties and NGOs is as follows:

Azerbaijan Democratic Party - 2
Yeni Azerbaijan Party - 8
Popular Front Party - 2
Musavat-4
Azerbaijan National Independent Party - 1
NGOs- 22
Students/teachers-26

The format of the conference was largely interactive and included workshops on NGO formation, fundraising, and volunteerism, as well as group discussions on regional issues and development of specific action plans.

The participants also developed and initiated actual volunteer projects during one afternoon. These projects included helping out at an orphanage, planting trees at the local park in Ganja, conducting an anti-smoking awareness campaign among the residents of Ganja with the help of flyers, helping the elders at the senior house, helping the soldiers at the army base and doing an educational event, where the passersby were reminded about the tragic events of the Karabakh war. IRI staff has observed all of the six projects and has selected the best one to award prizes.

On the last day of the conference, the participants developed their action plans for the 2005 to be implemented until the month of August and later compared with the action plans and activities of the youth in other regions, where IRI has done similar youth conferences. Some groups will conduct community projects; others have pledged to tackle education, AIDS, sanitation, election problems as well as lack of sport, cultural opportunities for the youth.

During the conference, IRI has also designed the workshop in which the youth could discuss the upcoming parliamentary elections, their ideas to make this election free and fair and ways to strengthen the youth participation in this election. The workshop was very useful in terms of building a consensus among the youth from various political backgrounds.

This conference is part of IRI's continued youth program in Azerbaijan encouraging youth to be active in politics and their communities.

Consensus Building

As part of USAID's program extension, IRI has been working on a program which will bring political parties together to discuss the issues of the day and hear other points of view. Azerbaijani political party members tend to think of democratic transitions as sudden replacements of one regime with another. Typically, however, this transition is a more gradual, incremental, and peaceful process. With this in mind, political parties need to learn the skills of negotiation and compromise, forming alliances, and open communication. This will occur through bringing the political parties together in a roundtable format to discuss ideas and differences.

To enhance political parties' abilities to communicate effectively, this quarter IRI conducted a consensus building seminar from January 12-14, 2005, that was attended by 25 senior party officials (members of the Parliament, heads of the regional branches and heads of the departments at the national headquarters) from four political parties (UMID, YAP, Adalat, Civil Solidarity). Three of the participants were female.

Topics included:

Day 1:

- Active Listening Skills
- Three models of negotiations: Hard, Soft, Smart
- Interactive Game "Gain as much as you can"
- Presentation on "Mutual Gains" Approach

- Case study of the Competing Youth NGOs

Day 2:

- Presentation on Consensus Building
- Interactive Game “Building Consensus in the “Second Town”
- Application of this game to Azeri reality

Day 3:

- Presentation on Real Peace Framework
- Interactive Game “Athens and Melos”
- Application of this game to Azeri reality

Constituency Offices

During this reporting period, IRI maintained its four constituency office programs in Gedebe, Baku, Nakchivan, and Lenkoran. The offices were founded in an effort to close the gap between constituents in the region and their elected parliament official in Baku. This quarter IRI continued exploratory talks with a member of parliament for possible additional office. IRI also calculated the total number of visitors to the constituency offices since their beginning of activity.

Baku- 1,177 persons (since January 2003)

Lenkoran- 1,098 persons (since January 2003)

Gedebe- 458 persons (since April 2004)

Naxchivan - 66 persons (since June 2004)

Local IRI Website

On February 7, 2005, at a reception in Baku, Azerbaijan, IRI officially launched its local Azerbaijani website www.iri.org.az. Approximately 100 people attended the event including leaders of major political parties, local NGOs, media, and international organizations. US Ambassador Reno Harnish delivered opening remarks.

The IRI website (in both Azeri and English languages) features information about political parties including platforms, structures and contacts for the parties. It also contains information about media outlets, elections and IRI activities in Azerbaijan in the past three years (including an updated IRI photo-gallery). In the future, it is planned to expand the website to include resources for the parliamentary elections scheduled in 2005.

This website is a new tool for political parties and the general public to become engaged in the democratic process in Azerbaijan. IRI has worked closely with the political parties in designing this website and providing the posted information. Voters that use the website will become better informed about the democratic process in Azerbaijan as well as making an educated choice between parties and candidates in future elections.

New Resident Program Officer/ Director of Political Development.

IRI hired Dallas Frohrib as the new Resident Program Officer based in Baku. His primary job will be to work the political parties and potential candidates for the parliamentary election, assisting them in their campaign training and staff development.

Mr. Frohrib has already met with a number of NGOs and political parties to learn about their needs during the election campaign for the November parliamentary elections and is currently developing a series of certification programs, beginning with basic political management and leading up to campaign manager level.

IV. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This is the third quarterly report since the approval of the two-and-a-half year extension. As a result of the changes that have occurred in Azerbaijan, new indicators have been added. In addition, prior to IRI's work with the political parties, only limited work was being done on the indicators that IRI has listed below. Because of this, the baseline for certain indicators that IRI had to work with was zero.

Result 1: Political Parties will become more effective both internally and externally.

Indicators:

- Political parties develop political party organization plans and long-term political education strategies.

At the recommendations of IRI and other international NGOs, several main political parties in Azerbaijan (ADP, Musavat and PFP) have finally formed a united coalition for the upcoming parliamentary elections. They are currently working on a joint strategy and a work plan on how to develop a list of common candidates.

- Political parties will show an increase in communication with their local organizations and implement their issues in the national party platforms.

Musavat, YAP and PFP have regularly held local party branch congresses to re-activate the local branches for the upcoming elections.

Musavat held a party plan development workshop in which all local branch chairpersons participated.

YAP held a national congress in which a new chairman of the party was elected and a strategic plan for the parliamentary elections approved.

- Political parties show progress in developing issue-based platforms, utilizing the polling and research skills in their message development.

Some political parties (Adalat, Popular Front Party, Musavat) and independent candidates with which IRI works have been involved and carried out a 3-month long project in which they developed legal, political and economic programs for the “Development of Azerbaijan in the next 10 years.”

- Political parties write campaign plans for the upcoming municipal and parliamentary elections, and implement get-out-the-vote efforts.

All major political parties that IRI works with have already developed their work plans for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Result 2: Young men and women will become more politically active, showing they are a formidable force for democratic change.

Indicators:

- Large numbers of young men and women participate in the 2004 municipal and 2005 parliamentary elections.

A “youth coalition” for the parliamentary elections is being currently developed by three local youth NGOs that IRI has worked in the past (“Reliable Future”, Young Lawyers Union and Azerbaijan Young Democrats Union).

- Number of youth civic oriented projects conducted with IRI’s assistance increases.

The youth in Sabirabad (members of IRI’s youth network) have conducted a town-wide educational event with the involvement of more than 500 school students.

The youth in Mingechevir (members of IRI’s youth network) have conducted a community project at the local orphanage.

The youth in Lenkoran (members of IRI’s youth network) have conducted an anti-narcotics seminar.

- Political parties show progress in strengthening their youth branches.

PFP held a large meeting with the youth organizations and members of the party’s youth branch.

YAP has nominated and elected several young persons (one of them even belongs to IRI’s youth network) in the regional branches of the party.

Result 3: Women become more involved in the political process both as candidates and as activists.

Indicators:

- Number of women candidates in the elections increases.

No results to report.

- Women show increased understanding about the political process.

Several women's NGOs and deputies in parliament have organized a roundtable discussion on the ways to increase women's participation at the upcoming parliamentary elections.

A "women's coalition" for the parliamentary elections is being currently developed by those women who want to become candidates.